

“The Battle of Remembrance”

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Thank you. It’s great to be among friends of the Navy League tonight. I appreciate and strongly support everything your local chapter is doing for our Sailors and Marines.

They benefit from the many activities and events hosted by the Navy League each year including the Navy’s Birthday Ball, sending care packages to troops serving far from home, and planning the TPS graduation.

These are efforts focused on our Navy’s past, present and future. All three are of great importance. Of course much attention is given to today and tomorrow in the form of current and future readiness — the heart of our mission.

But I also treasure the past — the history of our Navy — 231 full-color pages of America’s freedom story. In this book are brave and courageous people who still carry a message for us today.

If we open that book, just before the middle, just before the 19th century closes, we find one of those brave and courageous men standing on the deck of *USS Olympia*.

After sailing all night, and risking the mines of Manila, his flagship and its five followers are now in position. Commodore George Dewey knows his crews are ready — trained to use the heavy guns. He knows the enemy with the wooden hull is unprepared. And he knows Americans back home are still crying, “Remember the Maine.”

Knowing all this gives Dewey the confidence to tell his captain, “You may fire when you are ready, Gridley.”

The battle starts before daybreak. For five hours, Dewey’s steel ships cruise in circular motion, outgunning the weathered warships of the Spanish.

Shortly after noon, the red and yellow flag of Spain goes up in surrender.

That day, in the waters of Manila Bay, Dewey drew for us a historic pattern — a circle that starts with preparation and ends with remembrance. Its center holds crisis answered with capability.

Dewey’s order, “You may fire when ready” came after what he described as “the ceaseless routine of hard work and preparation in time of peace.”

Preparation is what sustains us when peace is interrupted by crisis. As a nation, the sudden sound of crisis wakes us.

The explosion of the *Maine*. The pounding at Pearl Harbor. The blast into *USS Cole* ...

Crisis creates the immediate need for greater capability and reliability for our Sailors and Marines. In crisis, they must be armed with confidence.

A poem about Dewey's battle explains why. The last line reads, "Sworn were we ever to this — now the hour and the test are at hand."

Today, about 100,000 Sailors and Marines are on deployment. Their hour and their test are at hand.

Our work is to keep our eyes on those Sailors and Marines — always looking ahead to their mission success and their safe return home. That is our work.

Our duty is to remember. To remember the ones who don't come home *and why*. To remember where they fought *and why*. And, most importantly, to remember what they fought *for*.

This is the resounding message on the pages of our Navy's history book. But sometimes I wonder ... does that memory message still interest our young Americans? I'm concerned that the naval impact on freedom's story is at risk of being lost.

To fight this, it seems we must engage in yet another battle — a battle of remembrance — to preserve the message whispered in pages of Navy past.

A message sent from the brave and courageous telling us to remember the *Maine*. Remember the *Cole*. Remember Pearl Harbor.

And many other memories we must not let slip through the fingers of future generations.

A young lieutenant must have felt the same way when he penned this more than a century ago. About the Battle of Manila he wrote, "...the memory of that morning's work [is] a precious inheritance to be transmitted to our children and to those who may be called upon to keep alive the traditions of loyalty to the Navy and to the great nation which we should be proud to serve."

I couldn't have said it better, Lieutenant.

Friends, let's work together to share that precious inheritance with all those in and around our Navy family.

Thank you.